



The National Park Service Fact Sheet

Alternative Transportation Program
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Water Transportation Alternatives in National Park Units

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Water transportation alternatives

in and around units of the National Park Service (NPS) include ferries, canal boats, water taxis, and other systems that transport visitors and park staff to and within NPS units.

These water transportation alternatives are integral parts of a park unit's overall alternative transportation system. For instance, visitors to Fort Sumter National Monument in South Carolina rely on ferries to access the fort, which is on an island in Charleston Harbor. Another example is Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts, where visitors can take narrated canal-boat tours and travel to park attractions, and other sites in the city of Lowell, on an historic trolley system.

Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) like these are helping to improve the visitor experience, relieve traffic congestion, and protect natural and cultural resources at 34 NPS units across the country that offer some type of water-based transportation. Due to their location or sensitive natural resources, eight NPS units, such as Fort Sumter and Alcatraz Island at Gateway National Recreation Area, are only accessible by water transportation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

NPS Alternative Transportation Program:
<http://www.nps.gov/transportation/alt>

THE ROLE OF WATER TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

The National Park Service (NPS) uses water transportation alternatives, including passenger ferries, water taxis, and canal boats, to improve visitor access to attractions inside NPS units and surrounding communities. In addition, park staff can use water transportation alternatives to provide interpretive tours and other educational services.

NPS is using water transportation alternatives to help relieve traffic congestion in and around NPS units. Offering visitors the option of taking water transportation alternatives instead of driving can lessen the number of automobiles on park and community roads, and can provide visitors with a more enjoyable park experience.



Two operators provide water transportation from Santa Barbara and Ventura, California, to the rugged spaces of Channel Islands National Park.



For decades, passenger ferries have been carrying millions of visitors each year to NPS units (including these approaching Statue of Liberty National Monument in the 1950s).



To visit Fort Sumter National Monument, which is located on an island in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, visitors take passenger ferries like the one above.

PROTECTING NATIONAL PARK UNITS

Nearly 300 million visitors from across the country and around the world visit our national park units each year. Many visitors come to enjoy the variety of water recreational opportunities that many NPS units provide, including boating, fishing, and swimming. However, as visitation continues to increase, the resulting traffic congestion on roads in and around NPS units causes air and noise pollution, haze, and impacts to fragile natural and cultural resources, including beaches, dunes, marshes, and freshwater areas.

NPS units can use water transportation alternatives to help reduce traffic congestion and improve visitor access and mobility. Water transportation alternatives can be part of NPS units' Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS), which can integrate all modes of travel within a park unit, including land-based transportation, such as shuttle buses, trams, and trolleys. NPS is using transportation alternatives to accommodate more visitors, alleviate traffic congestion, improve the visitor experience, and protect park resources at over 90 NPS units across the country.

EXAMPLES OF WATER TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES



Visitors can tour the historic Boston Harbor Lighthouse when they visit the Boston Harbor Islands.

BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA IN MASSACHUSETTS

Established in 1996, Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area (NRA) includes 30 islands located throughout Boston Harbor. With help from 14 state and federal agencies and private organizations, Boston Harbor Islands NRA offers passenger ferry service to George's Island. From George's Island, visitors can take smaller shuttle boats to other nearby islands. In all, during the summer season, ferry service is offered from Boston and the nearby town of Hingham to a total of six islands. In Boston, the ferry boarding location is within walking distance of the city's public transit system. What's more, ferry tickets are priced at less than the cost of a local movie ticket. Discounts for senior citizens, students, and school trips are also offered, making ferry service an affordable transportation alternative.

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE IN NEW YORK

Fire Island National Seashore is a narrow barrier island located along the south coast of Long Island, New York, and hosts many visitors each summer season. Local roads approach only the eastern and western ends of the island and are subject to severe congestion during peak travel times. To reach the 16 different NPS locations open on the island during the summer season, visitors, local residents, and seasonal employees use both water taxis and scheduled ferries from Long Island. These water transportation alternatives allow visitors to leave their automobiles on the mainland and to enjoy their island experience right when they step onto a water taxi or ferry. As one ferry rider noted to park staff, "Stepping on the ferry to Fire Island is like changing from my suit to my blue jeans."



Ferries going to NPS sites on Fire Island National Seashore run from mid-May through mid-October, while those running to the small residential communities on the island run for a longer season.



About 650,000 visitors come to Fort McHenry each year – including approximately 75,000 visitors who arrive by water transportation.

FORT McHENRY NATIONAL MONUMENT AND HISTORIC SHRINE IN MARYLAND

Located on Chesapeake Bay, Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine's role in defending Baltimore during the War of 1812 inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner." Today, industrial and residential development near Fort McHenry means that local streets are often congested, and that parking options are limited. Fort McHenry is now working to promote its alternative transportation options. Visitors can ride local public transit buses to many attractions in the downtown Baltimore Inner Harbor area, including Fort McHenry. In addition, visitors can buy a one-day, multiple-stop ticket for a water taxi to visit Fort McHenry and other Inner Harbor attractions. NPS and its partners are studying expansion of the water taxi service and linking it to other public transit options.

GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA IN CALIFORNIA

Faced with local traffic congestion, parking shortages, and a lack of transportation options linking its multiple sites, Golden Gate National Recreation Area is developing alternative transportation strategies – including a possible water shuttle system linking park sites in San Francisco Bay. As a first step, Golden Gate NRA surveyed visitors to help determine potential routes, terminals, schedules, preferred water transportation modes, and number of potential riders. Golden Gate NRA is now working with a variety of partners, including local and state government agencies, regional transit providers, and community groups, to develop an ATS.



To visit Alcatraz Island at Golden Gate National Recreation Area, visitors board a passenger ferry that departs from the San Francisco waterfront.